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Former teacher who had sexual relationship with student, 17, pleads guilty He gets probation, suspended sentence

October 31, 1997 | By Ivan Penn | Ivan Penn, SUN STAFF

A former drama teacher at Mount St. Joseph High School pleaded guilty yesterday to having a three-month sexual relationship with a 17-year-old student and, as a result, was given a suspended sentence and probation.

The former teacher, Robert A. Gee of the 1100 block of N. Calvert St., received a three-year suspended sentence and three years of probation for child sexual abuse.

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Gee, who also taught religious studies at the private boys' school, was prohibited from having contact with the victim and must register with the police as a sexual offender.

'I'm very sorry'

"I would like to apologize for my lack of judgment," Gee told Baltimore Circuit Judge Paul A. Smith. "I'm very sorry."

Michael Reed, the assistant state's attorney who prosecuted the case, said the sexual relationship between Gee and the male student was consensual, which played a key role in the outcome of the case.

"The victim confirmed that there had been a sexual relationship between him and the teacher. They engaged in a consensual sexual relationship," Reed told the court.

Under the law, minors may not give consent to adults, but consensual sexual relationships can be difficult to prosecute.

Peggy Mainor, executive director of the Baltimore Child Advocacy Network, a private, nonprofit organization that works with sexually abused minors, said cases in which the minor consents often result in little or no time behind bars for the accused while the victim is left to suffer.

"It's devastating" to the victim, Mainor said. "That's not the way it should be."

Mainor, whose organization is studying how the courts have treated adults accused of consensual sexual relationships with minors, said prosecutors often seek plea agreements in such cases because juries aren't sympathetic to victims who willingly participate in sexual relationships, even if they are minors.

"Jurors say, 'Why am I here? This was a voluntary act,'" said Mainor, a former city prosecutor. The result, she said, is often an acquittal, which is why such cases often are settled in plea agreements.

Smith said he could not comment about the sentence, which Gee could appeal.

'Inappropriate comments'

Gee and the student had known each other for about two years when the sexual relationship began in February. It ended in May when another staff member at Mount St. Joseph's overheard Gee "making inappropriate comments that hinted at sexual activity," according to court documents.

The staff member told another teacher, who informed the school's principal, Barry Fitzpatrick, according to the documents.

Gee resigned May 31.

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Max Lauten, Gee's lawyer, emphasized that the relationship was consensual. Reading letters from supporters, Lauten described Gee -- who was in tears at that point -- as "greatly admired and loved."

Lauten said Gee became involved with the minor after working closely with him and not having had a romantic relationship in several years.

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"The relationship in question is the only ethically compromised relationship" Gee had, Lauten said. "He had no sexual relationship with any student until this case. He is not likely to again."

Charles L. Reiter, president of the high school, would not comment on the court case, but he said sexual relationships between teachers and students at Mount St. Joseph are forbidden.

"A minor has been hurt," Reiter said. "He in the eyes of the law cannot give consent. It was absolutely against the law. We're very grateful that the whole thing has been brought to some closure."

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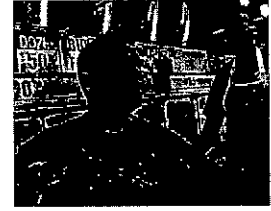
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